

The Feast of Belshazzar

Scenes Compiled as an Optional Amplification to the Super-Excellent Master Degree

2002

Prologue

The scene that follows depicts the infamous feast of Belshazzar which took place some years after the decree of Cyrus, liberating the Jews.

It is intended to show that pride and reckless infatuation ever go before a fall, and that sensuality and profanity are the sure forerunners of a sinner's doom.

Intoxicating drinks tempt men to daring that which they would shrink from sober, and conscience can turn even the most foolhardy into a cringing coward.

And finally, it is intended to lend new meaning to our vows as Masons, and emphasis to the ageold truth that men and nations worshipping the one true and living God have ever prevailed over those who have not.

Cast of Characters

Belshazzar King of Babylon

Rehurm Prince Chancellor

Arioch Captain of the Guard

Irijah Master of the Palace

First Lord of the Realm

Second Lord of the Realm

Third Lord of the Realm

Herald

Sentry

Satraps, guards and slaves as needed

First Soldier of Darius

Rocco the King's Jester

Two or more beggars

Seated leaders of the Jews

Daniel

Shadrach

Meshach

Abed-Nego

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

Zebediah

Ezra

Scene Four – ("Handwriting on the Wall") Music for all entries. Soft music for the captives until all is seated. Music while holy vessels is being carried in. Soft music while Jeremiah talks to the king. When Belshazzar says "Oh Gods Of Babylon!" Thunder and Lightning — When Belshazzar says "..... heavy heart and turneth every thought to mirth."

Writing appears on wall – when he laughs and drinks.

Stage – The stage is set representing a banquet hall, with two long tables, one on each side of the stage. Belshazzar and his guests use the table at the right of the audience, and the Jewish captives are seated at the one on the left of the audience.

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: King Belshazzar and his court approach the banquet hall!

They enter and seat themselves, with slaves and guards in the background.

Rehurm, rises and raises his glass: To our most noble sovereign, Belshazzar. THE KING!

All rise, drink, and seat themselves.

Belshazzar, laughs: My Lords, welcome to my banquet hall. Tis not often the lords of the realm can thus gather together, so for the time let us be joyful — let no heart be downcast. Drinks and laughs. You will notice we have prepared another table for our guests. Laughs. This is the merriest prank of all! Only this afternoon, Rocco, my court jester, Jester bows, laughs, proposed that for our entertainment this evening we have as our guests certain leaders of the children of Israel, this miserable band of Jewish captives brought out of Babylon by my noble father. And as nothing is too good for the guests of the king, he proposed they should eat their meat and drink their wine from the richest vessels in the realm. And what are the richest vessels in the realm? Laughs. Oh, my merry, madcap jester! The richest vessels, my lords, are the gold and silver ones brought by Nebuchadnezzar, my father, from the temple in Jerusalem. Now, the Jews are of the opinion they may be released from captivity to return to their own land to rebuild the temple they dedicated to the worship of the One they styled the one true and living God. So, for the entertainment of the evening, let us carry them along in that hope. Drinks and Laughs. Oh, the wit of my merry, merry jester! Pauses. Prince Chancellor, announce our guests!

Rehurm: Captain of the Guard, announce our guests!

Arioch, calls loudly: Herald, announce our guests!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Jeremiah, a priest and prophet of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Ezekiel, a priest and prophet of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Ezra, a leader of the children of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Zebediah, a leader of the children of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Shadrach, a leader of the children of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Meshach, a leader of the children of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Abed-Nego, a leader of the children of Israel!

Trumpet fanfare.

Herald: Daniel, a leader of the children of Israel!

All file in as announced, and take their places at the table at the left of the audience. They do not speak.

Belshazzar, rises, holding his glass in his hand: Welcome, thou leaders and prophets of Israel! Thou dost, indeed, do us honor; and we in turn desire to honor you by giving you to eat and drink from the most costly vessels in the land.

He claps his hands, and the slaves bring forth the vessels taken out of Jerusalem, and set them in front of the Hebrew captives and fill them with wine.

All laugh.

Jeremiah, rising: Oh thou noble Belshazzar, surely thy servants have made a horrible mistake! These vessels are the vessels taken from the temple of the living God at Jerusalem! No mortal man should drink from them! No mortal man should profane them by so sacrilegious an act.

All laugh.

Belshazzar: Jeremiah, I have made no mistake! Thou and thy companions are the guests of me, Belshazzar, THE KING, and didst thou not hear me say that there are no finer vessels in all of the realm, and that, as guests of the king, thou deservest the finest? *Cynical bow.*

Ezekiel, rises: Noble Belshazzar, surely your majesty jests! Come, suffer your servants to remove these vessels and reverently carry them back to their resting-place.

Arioch, laughingly: Ezekiel, you speak as though the God of Israel himself dwelt in your vessel.

Ezekiel: Arioch, speak not wickedly. These vessels were consecrated to the worship of the Lord God of Israel and, as priests and prophets of the living God we cannot be accessories to such wicked and impious conduct.

Jeremiah: Come, Companions, *starts to rise* let us leave this banquet hall, and suffer these indignities no longer.

Belshazzar, laughing: Oh, my lords! The humor of the situation far surpasses all of my expectations! Captain of the Guards, my guests would leave. *Laughs.* I fear you must implore them to stay! *Laughs.*

Arioch, grabs a spear from one of the guards and steps forward brandishing the weapon: Silence, miserable ones!! Dost thou not remember that the Kings invitation is the Kings command?

The captives sit back in their chairs resignedly.

Belshazzar: And now, my honored guests, to show I mean no offense, let us all join in a friendly drink; *raises glass*, drink that makes all jollity and mirth, and raises the downcast spirit. *All drink, except the captives. Who sit with folded arms.*

Rehurm: Most noble Belshazzar, thou dost know that we in this realm recognize many gods. There is the god of gold, the god of silver, and the god of brass, and of iron, and of wood, and of stone.

Long have we worshiped them and their works. But this band of Jewish captives wouldst have us believe that their God is the only God in the heavens and in the earth, and that all others must bow down before him. How thinkist thou, most noble Belshazzar, dost thou comprehend a God so powerful as to be God of all things and of all people at the same time?

Belshazzar: It has always been held by the holy men of this realm that no one God can be powerful enough or wise enough to over see all things at all times. So, we have perforce, the god of god, the god of silver, the god of brass, and of iron, and of wood, and of stone. And most pleasing, the god of wine! *Drinks.*

All but the captives applaud.

Irijah: Most noble Belshazzar, for the entertainment of our guests, let us inquire into the interesting question of which of our gods is the greatest, and whether or not the Lord God of Israel is as great as he. Surely such eminent authorities as Jeremiah and Ezekiel should be able to enlighten us. *Laughs and drinks.*

Jeremiah: Cease! I beg of you, this wicked and sacrilegious talk! Surely the Lord God of Israel wilt not hold thee guiltless for thy base and impious conduct.

Arioch: Silence! Remember thou art the guests of the King!

First Lord: Most noble Belshazzar, thou art indeed a mighty sovereign, as was thy father, Nebuchadnezzar, before thee. In all the nations of earth there is no king before thee, nor any god, before thy gods. *Applause and hurrahs by all except the captives.* Therefore, I now propose that the god of gold is the greatest god of all because the power of gold overcometh all things. It buyeth comfort, luxury, ease, and power. It buyeth kings, princes, and judges. And it buyeth the favor of women. To him who hath gold, nothing is forbidden. Therefore, there is no god greater than the god of gold.

Applause, shouting, wave their glasses, and all drink a toast to the god of gold.

Second Lord: Well, indeed, has the first lord spoken. But I submit that the god of silver is the greatest, for has not silver the power to do all that has been ascribed to the power of gold? Besides silver is a much stronger metal in it's own right. Gold in its pure state, is too soft to endure well, but must be hardened by admixture with a baser metal. Therefore, I submit that the god of silver is greatest.

Applause, all but captives drink a toast to god of silver.) (Jews sit with folded arms frowning.

Third Lord: Most noble Belshazzar, wisely chosen have been the words already spoken. But I submit that the god of stone must surely be greatest. There is nothing so enduring as stone. It maketh the enduring foundations that supporteth the mightiest palace of the king. It maketh the roadway for conquering legions of the realm. It maketh the mighty wall that turneth back the enemy.

Mighty is the god of stone — the mightiest of them all!

Applause, all wave glasses, and drink a toast to the god of stone. The Jews sit with folded arms and frowning.

Belshazzar: O my lords! Your wit amazes me! Before we hear further arguments from you, my lords let as hear from our guests. *Laughs and all but captives laugh with him.* How say you Ezekiel?

What canst thou say for thy God?

Ezekiel: Thou base and wicked King! Surely the Lord God of Israel is a patient God, with compassion on all the children of his creation, else surely thou wouldst have been stricken down in his wrath at thy arrogant and scandalous conduct. The Lord God of Israel – the god of Abraham, of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, is the only true and living God — and THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GOD BEFORE HIM!

Belshazzar and all of his nobles laugh.

Jeremiah: O, Belshazzar! Cease thy sinful ways, and suffer us to depart. Restore these holy vessels to their resting-place and grant us permission for our people to return to our own land and to rebuild the temple of Jehovah – the only true and living God.

Arioch: Depart? Return to thy land? Dost thou not appreciate the gracious hospitality of the King? *Laughs.*

Belshazzar, laughs: Thy repartee amuses me! *Laughs.* But before we hear further propositions, let us drink, as wine enliveneth the heavy heart and turneth every thought to mirth! *Thunder and lightning.*

Belshazzar laughs and raises his glass. All do likewise and drink. As they do so the lights dim out, and the handwriting is projected on the wall.

Belshazzar: O gods of Babylon!!

As the lights brighten up, Belshazzar's mouth is seen to open, his eyes stare, he staggers, is caught and helped to his seat by Rehurm. Thunder and lightning. The guests at the second table fall prostrate to the floor.

Belshazzar: Lords, what is the meaning of this writing? TELL ME! TELL ME!! SPEAK!

Rehurm: O noble Belshazzar, king and sovereign, I cannot. It is in characters strange to me.

Belshazzar: Bring the enchanters! Bring the Chaldeans! Bring the soothsayers!

Rehurm: Arioch, bring hither the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers that they may interpret the inscription!

Arioch: Guards, bring them hither at once! *The guards retire from the stage, and return bringing the three*

groups, each group dressed separately from the others.

Belshazzar: Whosoever shall read this writing and show me the interpretation thereof shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and he shall reign as one of three in the land! SPEAK UP!!

All confer among themselves, pointing to the inscription and shaking their heads.

First Soothsayer: My lord, we cannot read the inscription, nor can we give the interpretation. I can see nothing but black — the great black clouds that obscure the hall!

First Chaldean: Neither can we help thee, O King!!

First Enchanter: Neither can we most noble Belshazzar!

Belshazzar: Away with them! Be gone, wretches!

Arioch waves them off the stage.

Song "Hand Writing on the Wall".

Meshach: Thou shalt have no other God before me.

Shadrach: Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath. Thou shalt not bow down unto them nor serve them.

Abed-Nego: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Zebediah: The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or stand in His holy place?

Ezra: He that has clean hands, and a pure heart. Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

Meshach: Lift up your hands, O ye gates! And be lifted up, ye everlasting doors.

Shadrach: And the Kind of Glory shall come in.

Abed-Nego: And who is this King of Glory?

All in Unison: The Lord, strong and mighty!

Zebediah: The King of Glory shall come in.

Ezra: Who is the King of Glory?

All in Unison: The Lord, strong and mighty!

Belshazzar, pounds on the table. (Soft music through this scene.): CEASE THIS SILLY BABBLING, WRETCHES!! My lords, what shall we do? Is there no one who can read the inscription?

Thunder and lightening.

Irijah: O mighty sovereign, live forever. Let not thy thoughts be troubled, nor thy countenance be changed. There is a man in thy kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, and in the days of thy father, light and wisdom like that of the gods were found in him so that Nebuchadnezzar the king – thy father – made him master of magicians, enchanters, and soothsayers for knowledge of dreams and dark sentences, and dissolving of doubts.

Belshazzar: Let him be brought before me! Where is he! Speak up!

All confer hastily.

Rehurm: This most wise man is that Daniel to whom the prince of the eunuchs in the household of Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, gave the name of Belteshazzar, Yea, O King, he is even that same Daniel who now lieth prostrate on the floor before thee!

Belshazzar: Art thou indeed that Daniel which art of the children of the captivity of Judah whom my father brought out of Judah? I have heard of thee and of thy light and wisdom, and that thou canst give interpretations and dissolve doubts. Therefore, I command of thee, arise, Daniel, and interpret this thing to me, and, if pleasant, I will clothe thee in scarlet and will place a chain of gold about thy neck, and thou

shalt rule as one of three in the kingdom if thou choosest. Or, thou and the children of the captivity of Judah are free to return to thy own land. But if the interpretation be unpleasant, I shall have thee cast into the den of lions. AND LET THY GOD SAVE THEE!

Daniel, rises slowly while Belshazzar is speaking, and stands erect and proudly before him.

(Heavy thunder and lightning.): Let thy gifts be to thy self, and give thy rewards to another.

Nevertheless, I will read this writing, and make known the interpretation. O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, the kingdom and greatness and the glory, and because of the greatness he gave him, all the peoples and nations trembled and feared before him. Whom he would be slew, and whom he would be keep alive. Whom he would be raised up, and whom he would be put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit hardened that he dealt proudly, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him, and he was driven from the sons of men. His heart was like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses. He was fed with grass like the oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he setteth up over it whomsoever he will. And thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thyself, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven, and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee and thou and thy lords have drunk wine from them, and thou hast praised the gods of gold and silver, of brass, of iron, wood and stone, and thou hast not praised the only true and living God, in whose hand thine own breath is. Hear me, O king! This, then, is the interpretation of the thing:

The captives all rise.

"ME'NE" – God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end!

"TE'KEL" – Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting!

"PE'RES" – Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians!

Sounds of confusion and consternation.

The film of handwriting has been running continuously until now, when it is stopped the lights come up to full bright.

Belshazzar, shouts wildly: Away with him! Throw him to the lions! Guard closely the captive Jews!

Let not one escape! *Laughs wildly and somewhat madly.*

I AM THE KING !!!

Arioch: Guards, away with him! *The guards seize Daniel, and surround the captives.*

Trumpet fanfare and a herald enters on the run.

Herald: The soldiers of Darius are at the palace gates! O King, is there no escape?

Rehurm: Come! Let us escape!

Belshazzar and his court hurry off stage. The curtain comes down, then reopens after a short pause, showing the soldiers of Darius coming on stage, dragging Belshazzar with them.

First Soldier: So thou wouldest attempt to escape from the just retribution thou so richly deserve! Thou who so impiously and wickedly flaunted the Lord God of Israel. Thou who wouldst keep the children of Israel in bondage. *Laughs.* Never again shalt thy hand be raised against them.

AWAY WITH THEM!

As they leave the stage, Jeremiah advances to the front of the stage, raises his arms in a gesture of adoration.

Jeremiah, surrounded by captives: It is finished! God's promise is fulfilled! Jehovah reigns! *Soft music to swell.*

SOFT MUSIC FOR JEREMIAH'S LAST SPEECH.

Jeremiah: It is finished! God's promise is fulfilled! Jehovah reigns!

ALL MEMBERS OF THE CAST in costume have assembled in arches, while officers appear on stage.

Lecturer gives message. Illustrious Master gives closing address, after which circle of friendship is formed (To soft music.) Followed by the song "God Be With You" or "Auld Lang Syne" after which the Illustrious Master says: Waving further ceremony I declare this council of Super Excellent Masters closed. Companions you are dismissed.
Music throughout closing swelling as Council is closed.

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